



PLANT BULBS NOW FOR A COLOR-FILLED SPRING!

We all want to lengthen the show of color in our gardens. We choose perennials with extended bloom times; we plant annuals for summer-long color; and we choose plants with foliage that turns brilliant shades of orange, red and yellow in fall.

If there were one thing you could do now to ensure a garden bursting with color beginning in March (maybe even with snow on the ground), would you do it?

If you said yes, grab your shovel and plant some bulbs. If you said no, read on – I may convince you yet.

Planting bulbs takes a little work and a giant leap of faith. The hardest part may be getting started. I'll admit by the time September rolls around, I am getting tired. I have spent the summer planting, weeding, watering and moving plants. Some days I even relish the thought of snow covering up mistakes and neglected areas.

It can be difficult to get excited about planting seemingly lifeless bulbs in September and October when the payoff takes such a long time. But let me warn you... if you don't plant bulbs now, you will regret it next spring.

Still not ready to rise up - shovel in one hand, bag of bulbs in the other? Let me tempt you with what you could have blooming in your landscape beginning next March.

Double Snowdrops

Double snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis* 'Flore Pleno') grow 4" tall and sport nodding, double white flowers tipped in green beginning in late winter or very early spring. Plant snowdrops closely spaced in informal masses under trees and shrubs or tuck them into small nooks in perennial borders.



Glory of the Snow

Botanically named *Chionodoxa forbesii*, Glory of the Snow produces up to 15 lavender-blue star-like flowers in very early spring. Planted in front of evergreen shrubs, they glow. They are also pretty paired with spring-blooming wildflowers.

Another plus...after blooming, the foliage quickly yellows and disappears, leaving little of the graceless, but necessary stage of bulbs.

Grape Hyacinths

My favorite in the 'small, but mighty' category of bulbs, grape hyacinths (*Muscari spp.*) hold their grape-like flowers (hence the common name) on spikes. Individual flowers open gradually, prolonging bloom time. Plant grape hyacinths in a woodland setting with perennials or amongst groundcovers.

I plant grape hyacinths with every other bulb I plant. Because their foliage appears in fall, they create 'bulb markers' to remind me where all my other bulbs are planted.

Popular varieties include Cantab (extra large fragrant flowers) and Valerie Finnis (light lavender-blue flowers).



Crocus

Crocus, with small, cup-shaped flowers in countless colors, are the most widely grown of early-spring bulbs. They are among the first to emerge – sometimes blooming while snow is still on the ground. Plant them in rock gardens, in large drifts, or with small, spring-blooming perennials.



Squill

Squill (*Scilla*) are among the first bulbs to bloom in spring. Tiny, true blue flowers bloom on short spikes. Planted in mass, they create a sea of blue. Squill may be the best choice for naturalizing in the lawn because its foliage yellows and disappears quickly.

Daffodils

Nothing heralds the arrival of spring like the golden trumpets of daffodils. There are hundreds of varieties from the petite Baby

Moon to the large Dutch Master and the all-white Thalia to the red-cupped, orange-petaled Ambergate. With proper planning you can enjoy daffodils blooming from early to late spring.

Daffodils perennialize, providing years and years of flowers. Another plus...they are pest proof.

Tulips

Royalty of the bulb world, tulips are the most popular bulbs among gardeners. They are available in an incredible range of flower colors and bloom shapes.

Many are valuable for one or two years of bloom and then decline; some are truly perennial.

Tulips that perennialize include the Darwin group (including Apricot Impression, Ivory Floradale, and Olympic Flame), the Fosteriana group (including Exotic Emperor and Sweetheart), and the dwarf species tulips like Mary Ann, Hearts Delight, and Scarlet Baby.

Even tulips that don't perennialize deserve a place in your garden. Tulips are an inexpensive way to bring annual color to your garden!

Alliums

If you haven't included Alliums

in your garden's palette, plant some this year. These members of the ornamental onion family bear flowers that resemble fireworks celebrating the arrival of spring. From small varieties barely a foot tall to four-foot high selections that tower over spring-blooming perennials - none of them are appealing to deer or squirrels!

Care & Planting

Most bulbs grow well in soil amended with compost, but don't tolerate poor drainage.

Plant them pointy side up - if you're unsure which side is up, plant them on their sides. The general rule is to plant bulbs 3 times as deep as the height of the bulb and spaced about 2 times the bulb height. But don't get out the ruler – bulbs are forgiving (and they don't read the books).

Bulbs should be fertilized with bulb fertilizer at the time of planting and again after they finish flowering in the spring.

I hope I have convinced you to head to your favorite garden center and pick up some bulbs. When your landscape bursts into bloom after a long, cold winter, you'll be glad you did!